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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000593

SIPDIS
FOR AF/E, PRM/AFR, AND G/TIP:R.YOUSEY

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHSA](#) [KCRM](#) [KTIP](#) [DJ](#) [SO](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI SCREENING PRESUMED SOMALI MIGRANTS AND TRAFFICKERS
RESCUED BY USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN

REF: IIR 6 117 0008 09 (DTG: 010440Z DEC 08)

CLASSIFIED BY: Eric Wong, DCM, U.S. Department of State, U.S.
Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On May 31, the USS Lake Champlain disembarked 52 presumed Somalis in Djibouti, who had been picked up May 23 from a skiff adrift in the Gulf of Aden apparently en route to Yemen. UNHCR and Djiboutian officials are jointly screening the group's 48 would-be migrants, who include several children and a woman 9-months pregnant. Three suspected traffickers and one associate, all of whom are from Bosasso (Puntland, Somalia) are in the custody of Djiboutian police, awaiting prosecution on charges of human trafficking. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On the morning of May 31, the USS Lake Champlain disembarked 52 presumed Somalis at the port of Djibouti. The Government of Djibouti (GODJ) immediately bused the 48 would-be migrants under police escort to the refugee reception center at Loyada, near Djibouti's border with Somaliland, for joint screening by UNHCR and the GODJ's National Office for Assistance to Refugees (ONARS). UNHCR and ONARS expect to complete screening in three days. ONARS will provide food for the migrants; UNHCR will supply standard non-food items (e.g., blankets, mats, soap, washing buckets). Present at the pier during embarkation were ONARS director Hassan Omar, UNHCR acting country representative Shana Kaninda, and the Embassy's Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) Force Protection Detachment (FPD) chief, along with host country police and security officials.

¶3. (SBU) According to the USS Lake Champlain's crew, the 48 would-be migrants are all from southern Somalia. Some claim ties to other countries in the region: one woman is married to a Yemeni and has 4 children born in Yemen; another male claims to have worked previously in Djibouti (for UNHCR) and in Eritrea.

¶4. (SBU) The group includes a pregnant woman, a man with tuberculosis, a man with old bullet wounds, and a woman who claims to have been raped multiple times (by individuals who were not part of this group) prior to departing Somalia. UNHCR contracted with EMDA (a local refugee camp service NGO) to have a medical team available throughout the transfer.

SUSPECTED TRAFFICKERS IN DJIBOUTIAN POLICE CUSTODY

15. (SBU) Three suspected traffickers, and one associate who himself was being smuggled, are currently in police custody, for prosecution by Djiboutian authorities. (NOTE: ONARS director Hassan Omar, in a May 30 meeting with UNHCR and NCIS representatives, informed Ambassador that the GODJ sought to prosecute the suspected traffickers. END NOTE.) The four all reportedly hail from Bosasso (Puntland, Somalia). According to the crew of the USS Lake Champlain, the 3 suspected traffickers reportedly made death threats and physically assaulted other migrants; the only weapons found among the group were 2 long knives and several pocket knives. The USS Lake Champlain provided a CD with photographs and other information on the suspected traffickers to the GODJ. The skiff used by the suspected traffickers, approximately 35-feet long with twin outboard motors, has also been transferred to Djiboutian police.

GODJ SEEKS NO PUBLICITY OF DISEMBARKATION OF SOMALI MIGRANTS

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16. (C) The GODJ has requested that there be no publicity of the transfer of presumed migrants from the USS Lake Champlain to Djibouti, expressing concern that an announcement of the transfer could draw additional would-be migrants and asylum-seekers to Djibouti, especially from neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia. Post has forwarded suggested press guidance, which does not reference Djibouti, to AF/E and AFRICOM.

17. (C) COMMENT. Djibouti's decision to accept these travelers for screening by UNHCR--a step taken following personal approval by Djibouti's foreign and interior ministers--and to prosecute suspected human traffickers, underscores its strong commitment to support efforts to combat human trafficking, despite limited infrastructure and resources (reftel). Djibouti is likely to seek to repatriate those found not eligible for asylum or refugee status, which may require assistance from external actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM recently opened an office in Djibouti, with the support of the GODJ. Post will continue to monitor the situation, and to coordinate with UNHCR and local Djiboutian authorities. END COMMENT.
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